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ABSTRACT

A discussion of communicative interaction focuses on the knowledge needed to achieve politeness in different languages, especially how that body of knowledge differs across languages and can be taught in foreign language instruction. It is noted that oral communication must accommodate the existing social order by use of appropriate registers. Linguistic structures expressing politeness exist among these forms and rules of usage. They include lexical and grammatical forms, stylistic options, and some special formulas of usage, which are culture-specific. Use or non-use of the forms can create distinctly beneficial or negative effects in social interaction. They must be taught in an organized manner and through use of simulation of real-life communicative situations. Politeness formulas, while not extensively studied, reflect important linguistic problems of the language systems themselves and for second language instruction. While there exist some similarities in politeness formulas across languages, there are also many differences that become evident through contrastive language study. Without contrastive examination, these aspects of language can be learned in only a fragmentary, unilateral, and sometimes erroneous way. Therefore, mastery of a second language requires an understanding of politeness formulas, and the contrastive approach is required for thorough understanding. (MSE)

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AN ASPECT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN COMMUNICATION: POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND CONTRASTIVE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The area of special politeness forms and strategies studied in a contrastive approach is of great importance in language teaching. These forms and strategies are an essential part of communication in any language and present, in each language, some specific peculiarities. Their differential teaching is necessary because, if certain common features and elements - maybe universal ones - are undeniable, there are, however also important differences between the various languages that would enter into contact in the learner during the learning process of a foreign language.

The paper presents an overview, from the contrastive point of view, of some general forms of politeness, mostly insisting upon the "politeness formulas" (definition, synthetical conclusions concerning their structure and functions, comparative aspects), to which the author devoted several studies (in Romanian language, followed by a current research in Italian, with a larger team, and some remarks on other languages in a comparative framework, aiming at demonstrating the necessity of contrastive studies aiming at improving foreign-language teaching).

0. One of the major aims in modern teaching of foreign languages in to enable the learners to communicate in the target language, thus creating efficient interaction between the partners. In this respcet, the contrastive (Cs) approach can be very useful. There is however much to be done still, in this regard, in the field of both fundamental and applied research regarding communication strategies.

In was not sufficiently underlined, in Cs linguistics, that one special area of knowledge is of great importance, namely knowledge (including forms and strategies) that is necessary to achieve "politeness" behaviour. This knowledge (which is not only of "pure linguistic" nature) is an essential part of the forms and strategies of communication in any language, and presents, in each language, some specific peculiarities. Their differential teaching is necessary because, if certain common features and elements - maybe universal ones - are undeniable, there are, however, also important differences between the various languages that would enter

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into contact in the learner during the learning process of a foreign language.

1.0. "Teaching communication" implies, firstly, as a basic postulate, taking into consideration the human peculiarities of the learner and the situations (of a social order) in which he is living and where he is, at a certain moment, and therefore to help him to manifest himself, in order to communicate in that language, as an emitter and as a receiver as well. Secondly, this implies transmitting to the learner the knowledge that is necessary to communication and to train him in the strategies of communication in the respective language. Consequently, a teaching process is needed that develops communication and, as much as possible, actieves teaching in situations of communication.

1.1. This orientation corresponds not only to the theory which I have maintained for a long time concerning language and the psycholinguistic approach in keeping with this theory (Slama-Cazacu 1959/1961, 1968/1973, etc.), putting the stress on the study of language behaviour as an act of communication and in contexts (both determining and being determined by various factors) but also to present-day trends in foreign-language teaching.

1.2. "Communication" in real life situations consists more often than not of exchanges of replies of oral nature; and, in the majority of situations, it occurs within (and has the aim of) interaction, of a social order, between the partners. In this interaction, the partners try either to obtain "profits" through an "open" competition or (more frequently, for pragmatic reasons at least) to arrive at an agreement (in the sense even of "entente"), a balanced satisfaction of reciprocal interests, and an equitable - at least, apparently - distribution of the "profits" for each of the partners.

The necessity results in having recourse, for communication, to the registers that take the most adequate for the situations and for the partners, to use those forms of expression that can satisfy them, make them "benevolent" concerning eventual solicitations included by the emitter in the act of communication and, at any rate, create a favourable impression in the partners. Among these forms, many are strictly codified (lexically, grammatically and even at the suprasegmental level of intonation) in each

language; consequently, their use tale quale, as far as their form is concerned, is obligatory in a certain situation.

2.0. To this large category of forms and rules of usage or of strategies of communication pertain the linguistic structures expressing politeness (P) in a certain language. They concern lexical and grammatical forms and stylistic options as well as special formulas (F).

2.1. An important feature must be stressed: these forms and rules of adequate usage are not purely linguistic or structurally autonomous in the behaviour of the individuals. They are very closely linked to the cultures of societies and, consequently, they are not only fixed through social norms, but they are also very variable from a society to another. Members of the same society must learn them (in the native language) since the early childhood (I have studied this aspect, verifying the above assumption, eg. in Slama-Cazacu 1957/1984, 1961/1977). They also learn that their use is obligatory (in the same studies I also presented data concerning the early appearance, at 3 years of age at any rate, of the linguistic consciousness of this coercion). The fact of not using them, in the respective society, is considered a transgression - sometimes very grave - of the norms of communication. Such a fault is sanctioned very often, verbally or through an attitude or behaviour of the people of the surroundings. A foreigner who does not know these forms and strategies (or does not use them, or uses them inadequately) will perhaps be met with clemency, but most frequently his behaviour will make a negative impression (especially if the partners do not know the Fs in the other's language or do not realize that they might be different from their own). This effect will be even more important, if the interlocutor speaks the foreign language well and the "native" partners do not imagine that the fact that he does not use the appropriate forms and Fs is caused by real linguistic ignorance; therefore, he might be suspected of misbehaviour, intentions to offend, arrogance, or even agressive conduct.

Even more so, situations of professional life impose their appropriate use, so that their inadequate use has either negative effects or, even, heavy consequences (as, for instance, in commercial or generally economical negotiations, relations of communication during the working process, relations with a customer, etc.). The correct use of these forms, in their most subtle nuances, may cause positive effects for social interaction or

even economic benefits[1].

2.2. A foreigner who does not learn exactly the respective forms and their value in using or not using them can not be considered as really mastering the foreign language which he intends to employ in communication. I would like to mention here also the case of immigrants who have to learn a language for practical aims (mostly for oral communication), and also of students coming from abroad to do their studies in a university or to have a specialized training in a certain field (who receive, in certain countries, the first course in the language they will need for their studies, and who will need that language not only for scientific information and for understanding the lectures delivered at the respective university, but also for their relationships with the university staff and their colleagues, etc.). There are so many lexical forms, grammatical structures, suprasegmental elements and paralinguistic features (and I would also include the nonverbal components of a communicative act, such as gestures, facial expression) which are specific, at a large extent, to language therefore, they have to be taught in an organized manner and submitted to a training in simulated real life situations of communication.

One must say in French Mon colonel, and not, as in other languages, Monsieur le colonel: or Oui, Madame Monsieur, while in other languages (such as Romanian) the mention of the addressee is not obligatory; in Italian one says Professore, while in French this professional title is generally not used in addressing (instead Monsieur/Madame are required by the "norm"). In English the you has the same value in formal or informal register; in French and Italian there are tu/vous, tu/Lei, while in Romanian there are three degrees (very much used): tu/dumneata/dumneavoastra which are all learned by children at a very early age.

3.0. A distinct category in the register of P is that of politeness formulas (PF). I have dealt with them in detail in some recent studies of mine, because they have not enjoyed much attention in foreign language

1 Recently, the decision was taken in France in the "hotellerie de luxe" to go back to the traditional politeness: e.g., in such restaurants, to replace questions like "Fromage ou dessert?", or "Combien de cafés?", with "de petites phrases plus agréables à entendre et qui, de surcroit, ont le mérite de gonfler les additions" such as: "Ce camembert ou ce chèvre vous plairait-il?"; or; "Un café vous ferait-il plaisir?" ("Le Point", 1985, no.670, p.60, by J.P.Adine).

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teaching and in Cs linguistics and because they are represented by very structured forms which must be learned and used as such in definite situations, with skilled precision.

3.1. PFs are apparently only a "minor" aspect in a language. They involve important problems in linguistics - concerning the system of the language in question - as well as in the pedagogy of languages and in the practical behaviour of speakers/hearers, as they oblige to a very appropriate use in communication (and, even more, in the general behaviour of people in social settings; sometimes, the only communicative act is, obligatorily, a PF).

The first problem is the scarcity of studies in these Fs in various languages. For the purposes of teaching, there should exist studies in them in the language which is to be taught; for the moment, there are only a few, by the side of American-English[1]: Romanian (the first study was published by myself in 1983; it also includes references to other languages), Italian (under study in Italy under my direction),[2] and sporadically some other languages , such as Greek and Turkish.[3] For the teaching process, it is also necessary to have comparative studies (these are also very rare; the studies of Slama-Cazacu (1983, 1986a, 1986b) are among the first to be published if not the only ones) Finally, it is also necessary to have thorough Cs studies for L_1 and L_2 (there are some partial studies concerning English-German, English-Hebrew,[4] and those

1 Brown and Levinson 1978, Brown and Ford 1964, Coulmas 1981b, Edmondson 1981, Ferguson 1976, Goody 1978, Kendon and Farber 1973, Lakoff 1973, Manes and Wolfson 1981, Wolfson 1981a, 1981b, etc.

2 A study (including three regions of Italy: North, Center and South, with a team of ten persons) which started in 1983; the same questionnaire as for the study in Romanian was used and also the same classifications that the present author elaborated for the PFs in Romanian. First results were communicated at the Round Table "Politeness formulas ans social interaction", at the "First International Congress of Applied Psycholinguistics" (ISAPL), Barcelona, 1985.

3 Eisenberg 1982, Komnenich 1977, Matisoff 1973, Tannen and Öztek 1981, Tohyama 1983, Youssouf et al. 1976. For Russian, a book by Akisina and Formanoeskaja 1978, concerns P style for the needs of teaching Russian, as a foreign language, but PFs are not mentioned.

4 Cohen et al. 1985, 1986 in press, Edmonson 1977, House 1980, House and Kasper 1979.

mentioned above for Romanian and Italian in contrast with other languages). I have underlined the need of ample research (the research in Italy is an example of such projects) carried out by teams from various countries with a common methodology (mostly a common questionnaire), similar data processing, and an interdisciplinary basis for research and for interpreting the data.

3.2. We can certainly put forth the hypothesis that there exist similar forms and strategies of PFs, especially in areas which are geographically close to each other or which have had contacts in the past or a common history. There are also similarities because of linguistic loans or because of particularities which are specific to the human being (hence my hypothesis on some universals of PFs: their structured, short, fixed form, the association with determined situations, their selection also in keeping with the partner, etc.). There are, however differences which impose their study and teaching in a Cs approach.

3.3. The concept of P is variable, historically and geographically;[1] let us mention French politesse (deriving mostly from royal court rituals and from the "salons littéraires"), Italian cortesia (historically linked to "la corte" of the upper classes life), compared to Romanian traditional buna cuviinta[2] "doing what is becoming" (initially mostly linked to a rural tradition, of a sense of solidarity in a population submitted to a difficult history). The Fs expressing P are also variable in time in the same linguistic community; they have an obvious dynamics: some Fs disappear or are "forgotten", or "decay" - receiving new shades in meaning; certain connotations enter

1 The penury of studies on P even in sociology, social psychology, etc. made me launch a call for such studies, see Newsletter (European Association of Experimental Social Psychology), 1985, Nov., p.8.

2 Cipariu 1855, Zanne 1890-1912, volXVII, p.322, Golescu 1975 new edition; the author wrote at the beginning of the 19th century . Upon defining P in Romanian, I also used a large gamut of expressions pertaining to the same semantic field, which are peculiar for Romanian as far as their connotations and relations intra-field are concerned: buna cuviinta "good manners" ad litt. "doing what is becoming" , buna purtare "good conduct", a te purta frumos cu ceilalti, a avea bun simt "to have good breeding, to know what is becoming", a-ti pastra obrazul "to keep one's face" (not in Goffman's sense: in order to express solidarity with the others), a face fata "to cope with a situation" (fata = "face"), omenie "humaneness" (what is peculiar to humanity, with a moral character), also in the expression: a fi om de omenie "to be a man with humaneness".

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their general semantic area; they sometimes receive ironical nuances, etc.; some other Fs appear at a certain moments; the frequency of usage varies in time. External influences play an important rôle in this dynamics. It is obvious that in teaching a foreign language this dynamics must be taken into account and the difference be stressed between the currently used (which are necessary for oral communication or in official correspondence etc.) and the obsolete ones (whose sense must be known however, for the understanding of literature for instance). The process of teaching has to underline the differences in their values for various situations, for the options connected with partners' age, social strata, etc.

3.4. It is possible, and even necessary, to consider all PFs as single unitary categories (with various sub-categories such as greetings, compliments, requests, thanks, wishes, etc.), because they fulfil the same general function, a common mechanism and structural features as well (see Slama-Cazacu 1983, 1986a).

3.5. In general - in the same language and, probably, in all languages - the form of PFs is typical: stereotyped, learned and used as such; a brief form (the greatest frequency, measured up to now in Romanian and Italian is of PFs of 2-3 words); often elliptical - their sense is commonly interpreted through the context. They imply an exclamatory intonation, sometimes include prosodic elements, a semantic field with positive values ("happiness", "pleasure", "health", etc.). Social convention imposes a certain obligatoriness in the use of PFs concerning their form (a fixed or relatively invariable structure) and concerning their use (using specific Fs) in certain situations.

In many languages, PFs imply an answer; therefore a dialogue is obligatory in the shortest form of address-answer: "-Good morning.-Good morning" or: "-Congratulations.-Thank you". In Romanian, many PFs are constructed as obligatory dialogic[1] strings of Fs: "-How old are you? -Fourty. -May you live still more. -Thanks, the same (to you too)"; "-Is your coat new? -Yes. -May you enjoy wearing it in good health", "-Have you children? -Yes. -How many? -Three. -I wish you joy of them ad litt.: May they live (well) to you . - Thank you, the same for yours etc.".

1 Cf. also, for the peculiarities of dialogue in Romanian: Slama-Cazacu 1981 ("dialogic syntax").

3.6. The Cs study and teaching of the PFs is compulsory. I will only present here some examples to support this principle.[1]

3.6.1. Some similarities between PFs in various languages:

(1) In Romance languages: Fr. Bonjour, It. Buongiorno, Sp. Buenos dias, Romanian Bunaziua. In Serbo-Croatian Dobar dan. In Finnish (Fin.) Hyvää päivää.

3.6.2. Here are some slight differences, imperceptible sometimes to a foreigner, who will tend to manifest interferences with his mother tongue or with other languages previously learned; a special stress should be put, as a consequence, on such forms:

(2) The meaning "Pleasant dreams": Engl. Pleasant dreams, Rom. Vise placute "golden dreams": It. Sogni d'oro /"sweet dreams": Engl. Sweet dreams, Gr. Oneira glyka, Scr. Slatko sanjaj, Turk. Tatli rüyalar. "beautiful dreams": Fin. kauniita unia.

3.6.3. Other differences are very salient. These differences make it difficult to translate or to explain the learners such expressions in languages where there are no corresponding Fs (or where these Fs are no more in use). Here are PFs that are completely different for the same situations; they also mirror different mentalities:

(3) (at a burial) RL Sa-i fie tarina usoara "Be earth light to him/her", Russ. Zeml'a byla puom "Be earth light as a feather (fluff)", Scr. Laka joj (mu) crna zemlja "Light black earth (on him/her)" - while in Turc. Topragi bol olsun "May he/she have plenty of earth" (hence: heavy!; see the explanation of this form in Slama-Cazacu 1983).

(4) "Please" is not used in the Aromanian dialect (see Slama-Cazacu 1983) or in Finnish.

3.7. Practical consequences and problems are obvious, not only for translation, but also for the teaching of foreign languages. Without a Cs study of these aspects, a language will be learned in a fragmentary,

1 Here are only some of the examples presented in Slama-Cazacu 1983 (where references concerning the informants and method are also given). We have chosen examples mostly demonstrating the need for Cs studies, which was not dealt with in that paper. Some new examples are added here on Scr. (communicated by Mirko Jivković, 1986). Finnish examples from Mervi Eloranta.

unilateral and even erroneous way. An Italian might directly translate into French the very frequent Italian PF (used at a wedding) Auguri e figli maschi "(Good) wishes and (have) boys",[1] which would seem ridiculous in French, as well as in other languages. There are PFs which must not be taken ad litteram as a real invitations such as Spanish Mi casa es Su casa "My house is yours" (which does not mean you are invited to dwell in it), or as American English Come again (which is a real invitation only if a precise date is added, cf. Wolpsson 1981), while in Romanian Mai dati pe la noi "Come again to us" has the sense of a real invitation. A foreigner who learns Romanian must know that the PF (which might be met with in a text referring to historical events in the past) Sarut picioarele Mariei Tale "I am kissing the feet of your Highness" is no longer used and the young generation in Spain would be very surprised if they heard the PF, used by older generations in the past, Me ponga a los pies de Su Senora "Put me at the feet of your wife".

3.8. Situations in everyday life as well as in professional life make it necessary for people to know and to use correctly the PFs even in informal situations and much more in formal ones. Their learning is obligatory for a complete mastering of a foreign language and therefore they should be included in the process of foreign language teaching, where a Cs approach will certainly be a basic prerequisite.

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1 In a special dialect of Turkish (cf. Tannen and Oztek 1981: 534) the polite answer to the question: "How many children have you?" is " I have two sons and excuse me one daughter ".

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